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DEPARTMENT FOR PA/OBS/BS, EUR/PD

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SUBJECT: FY06 TV CO-OP NOMINATIONS

1. We are pleased to nominate two TV co-op project ideas for consideration under FY06 funding.

#### THE GENERAL CONTEXT

2. The bilateral relationship was strained by differences over Iraq, and while relations have improved, the French media has an ingrained tendency to portray the United States as a bullying, hegemonic power, and a 'unilateral' nation when it comes to the United Nations, military intervention in Iraq, climate change, or trade considerations. 'Fortress America' is yet another view: an America that wages war to fight terrorism, abuses detainees and treats Muslims as potential terrorists. Another common charge is that the United States wishes to see a weak European Union, the better to retain its super power status. Many thoughtful French contacts are worried about these perceptions and have argued that France and the United States must strive to explain and understand each other better given the charged atmospherics.

3. Set against the national media's take on the U.S.-French relationship, there is the regional television scene that rarely looks at the United States. The regional, autonomous stations are well watched by their respective publics and take a very local focus in their news programming. We have been working on expanding our ties with the local television stations throughout the country to learn about their programming and to see how we could cooperate on programs of mutual interest. The following TV co-op proposals are the results of these efforts and will serve to increase better understanding of the United States, its society, and its policies.

PROPOSAL ONE: 'ALLAH BLESS AMERICA: A PROFILE OF ISLAM IN THE UNITED STATES' BY AN INDEPENDENT FILMMAKER IN COOPERATION WITH FRANCE 3 TELEVISION BASED IN MARSEILLE

4. Documentary filmmaker Jean-Louis Boudart produced a moving 52-minute documentary entitled 'Beyond the Brooklyn Bridge' in 2004. It shadowed two American students who wished to go beyond cliches to better understand Arab and Muslim culture. The shooting of the piece took place in New York, Marseille, in the south of France, and Fez, Morocco. The result was a superb portrait of both intellectual receptivity and young America's openness to new ideas and cultures. It aired on France 3 television in Marseille, France's third largest city and home to one of France's largest and youngest Muslim populations, mostly first and second-generation immigrants from North Africa.

5. Boudart is talented, open-minded and highly professional. He would like to profile American Islam, which he knows is the fastest growing religion in the United States, and produce a portrait that, we expect, would show America's religious pluralism and broad acceptance of differences. He would like to interview American converts to Islam, as well as Muslim immigrants and second generation Muslims, to see how they live their faith and how they are viewed by mainstream Americans in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Are Muslims excluded from the American way of life? Are they potential terrorists or new religious pioneers? Boudart has reached an agreement with France 3 in Marseille to air this proposed documentary upon his return.

PROPOSAL TWO: 'LESSONS LEARNED ACROSS THE ATLANTIC: AMERICAN THOUGHTS ON A GROWING EUROPE' BY FRANCE 3 TELEVISION BASED IN ALSACE

6. Unique in its internationalist-slant, France 3-Alsace is the only television channel in France to specialize in European issues. It is headquartered in Strasbourg, which is home to the Council of Europe, with one office in Brussels. For the past eight years, France 3 Alsace has produced a show called 'Europeos,' which is also broadcast on the national France 3 network and via 75 regional channels throughout Europe. It focuses on trans-European issues, specifically the challenges and consequences of 'the European construction' on the daily life of citizens. Some 400 programs are produced annually.

7. Daniel Riot, Chief Editor of 'Europeos,' is eager to

undertake a program on the American perspective of the construction of Europe. He wants to go beyond the U.S. government's viewpoint, though he is interested in 'eurocrats' and bureaucrats and American policy. Little European airtime is devoted to analysis of why many Europeans believe America wants a 'weak Europe,' notwithstanding our policy statements. Realistic American attitudes towards the strengthening European power also receive scant treatment. His program would focus on several questions: Is America afraid of losing its dominant status, or is it excited about the opportunities that a strong Europe presents? What are those opportunities? And, how is a developing Europe changing the lives of Americans and Europeans at the grass roots level? Recent polls have indicated Americans are in favor of a Europe playing a larger role on the international stage. Such a program would help persuade a skeptical Europe that the U.S. indeed supports a strong Europe.

18. As the program explores these issues, it will also look at immigration and multi-cultural America. As a country built by immigrants, America has grappled for 200 years with integrating minorities into society. Europe today faces a similar, albeit different, challenge, especially with the growing Muslim population in France. What can Europe learn from American examples? From the post-Civil War South to modern-day integration, America has no shortage of examples. Mr. Riot wants to demystify this question and hear candid opinions from citizens of both sides of the Atlantic about their evolving societies. He would like to seek out minorities in the U.S. to interview, including first- and second- generation Muslim immigrants, as well as Americans who have converted to Islam.

STAPLETON